

MEMORANDUM

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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REMARKS OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (ISA)
JOHN T. McNAUGHTON, AT THE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES
DePAUW UNIVERSITY, GREENCASTLE, INDIANA, JUNE 6, 1965

It is a very nostalgic occasion for me, as well as an honor, to be addressing this particular audience, in this setting. I sat where you sit early in World War II.

Those of you who are graduating today look on the end of this school year, as I did in 1942, with mixed feelings. And at least one reason for your mixed feelings is South Vietnam -- a problem area in which I happen to invest a good deal of my creative energy and time (I have been there twice in the past four months).

Despite this, I am one of the few officials concerned with Vietnam who has not had occasion so far this spring to confront an academic audience on these issues. Like certain others, I was forced by a crisis in the Caribbean to be a "drop-out" from the Teach-in in Washington last month. Since today, at term's end, appears to be my last chance to redeem myself, I would like to comment now on two or three of the issues of our involvement in Vietnam that the debates and teach-ins, as I have followed them, have shown to be salient.

To begin with: The phenomenon of the debates themselves deserves a word in retrospect. Many of you may have heard the parody by a popular comedian of the valedictory address by the captain of a nuclear submarine to his crew at the end of a six month's cruise. After a long and sentimental summary of their six months together under the seas, the captain pauses, takes a deep breath, and reflects: "Looking back on the mutiny . . ."

*Return to
Dr. Ellsberg
(this is the
semi-final version
from which -- to shorten --
some good prose
was ultimately
snipped).*

Well, "looking back on the Teach-ins . . ." it seems clear that one of the feelings they reflected, aside from disagreements over policy, was a suspicion in some academic circles that Government officials were publicly and perhaps even privately over-simplifying issues, ignoring threats and risks and costs, wishing away difficulties and unpromising prospects. Obviously, in someone who thinks hard about problems, confidence is not inspired by public statements that may seem to express a simple view of the issues and a rather simple optimism -- as public statements by all Governments have a natural tendency to do.

It may be that the Government needs to find a way to communicate specifically with the academic community of scholars and serious students -- a channel for dialog in which one can take the time for detailed reasoning and examination of evidence and consideration of many issues, including reassessment of premises, values, probabilities, and so on.

Any such dialog would be extremely expensive in terms of high Government officials' precious time; but there are occasions when it would be justified.

What, in the end, would be accomplished?

Few, I am sure, would be converted from one set of firm views on policy to an equally strong belief in the opposing views. But the reactions encountered by one of my colleagues, who participated in several teach-in sessions and found himself stimulated and encouraged by them, are revealing. He found that a number of students from audiences that were, initially, almost uniformly hostile, came up to him after the long discussion to say: "Now, I'm confused." That, he thought, was almost sure to be a long step in the direction of wisdom.

The other reaction that was reported to him was that he had "re-assured" many members of his audience about Government policy-making -- not by the substance of what he said, because many of them ended up disagreeing with that -- but by the very demonstration that Government officials were human beings, were using reason on these problems, were doing their level best to weigh a multitude of considerations including long-range consequences, and were listening to opposing views.

It seems too bad that such an impression would strike an American audience as in any way surprising or revealing or "reassuring." But perhaps it is necessary from time to time to go into greater detail and to deal with subtler nuances than most public occasions, with their multiple audiences, will allow about matters of difficulty, doubt and controversy within the Government. It is nearly always mistaken to imagine that the Government is either monolithic or totally self-assured in matters of the highest import. That observation certainly applies to the subject of Vietnam. Scarcely a question, a doubt, a concern has been raised, I believe, by any critic of the Administration in recent months that had not been raised for discussion at some point by some participant in the policy-making process within the Administration.

In my remaining time today, I propose to discuss several questions which go to the essence of the Government's policy with respect to Vietnam.

The first question is: Why are we in South Vietnam? You have heard the President's answer to this on many occasions, including his address at Johns Hopkins on April 7 and his message to Congress on May 4.

First, we are there to keep a promise. The promise of the United States has been made by three successive Presidents, clearly and in constant terms. It would be wrong to break that promise. Furthermore, the value of the national promise of the United States -- the reputation of America "from Berlin to Thailand" -- is at stake today in our undertaking behind the Government and people of South Vietnam.

Second, we are there to draw a stop-line to Asian Communist aggression. Since the end of the Second World War, the leaders of what is now North Vietnam have worked to impose a Communist state over all of Vietnam. Their further ambitions extend at least to the remaining parts of former French Indochina -- Laos and Cambodia. Their campaign was accelerated in 1960, about the time that Ho Chi Minh announced at the Third Congress of the North Vietnamese Communist Party the necessity for North Vietnam "to step up the . . . revolution in the South." And close behind the Hanoi regime, supporting it and spurring it on in pursuit of its goals, are the leaders of Communist China. A Free World withdrawal from the challenge in the jungles and mountains of Vietnam would merely transfer the battle line to other places. How much had to be swallowed up before World War II before we learned that simple lesson?

Finally, we are there on a mission to help South Vietnam -- indeed all of the countries in the area -- to make progress through orderly change. Progress in coming and must come in this changing world. Especially the young people quite properly have great aspirations. Old social structures will be immersed in turbulence. It is for us, with our enormous talents and physical resources, to help men everywhere to find the new course without sacrificing their freedom.

We seek the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom from attack. President Johnson has made clear that "we will do everything necessary to reach that objective, and we will do only what is absolutely necessary."

There you have our ends and guidelines.

I have the feeling that many of those who differ with those ends and guidelines tend to ignore in particular the factor of commitment, as that commitment has evolved over the last decade and as that commitment is seen from the three perspectives of the South Vietnamese, of the Communist Bloc and especially Communist China, and of all those nations in the world who regard their security as dependent upon any form of U. S. guarantee. Here is one place where Communist China and the United States agree. Communist China sees the U. S. Government's commitment to the independence of South Vietnam as real, and U. S. Government's future influence in the Far East as turning on whether that commitment is proved to be worthless. We are being tested, that test is one of the largest stakes at issue.

To write off the impact of such a demonstration upon potential aggressors and upon their potential victims is to expunge the most important lessons to be learned from the history of the past 30 years.

What, then of the means by which we are supporting our commitment? Two aspects of our programs, in particular, have raised questions: One is the U. S. and Vietnamese air strikes against selected military targets in North Vietnam; and the other, the deployment of some U. S. combat units

to South Vietnam, along with increased support personnel and with the use of U. S. aircraft in direct combat support within South Vietnam. Are these steps appropriate to our ends? Why were they needed, and why at this time?

It is not another Korean war in which conventional military forces face each other along a battle line. Nor is it another Greece, where local Communist dissidents used neighboring Communist areas as sanctuary. We must understand that, while some of the people of South Vietnam are supporting the Viet Cong, the war is not a simple local rebellion. What is new and different is that, in Vietnam, the techniques of rebellion have been harnessed by a neighbor set on conquest. We are witnessing a method of concealed aggression that the Communists hope to use against vulnerable nations all over the world. To gauge its prospects of success -- to understand the vulnerabilities it exploits and the requirements for combatting it -- we must recognize the basic tactics of their approach. That approach aims, in the first instance, not at destroying armed forces or winning control of territory, but at destroying the roots of the existing government and exhausting the patience of the population.

The Viet Cong, in South Vietnam have never been able to rely upon the broad and deep nationalistic appeal that the Viet Minh, in its guise of a genuine Popular Front against a colonial power, enjoyed prior to 1954. But the Communist techniques of rural insurgency, developed by Mao Tse-tung in his 20-year struggle in China and perfected by Ho Chi Minh and General Giap in their nine-year fight against the French in Indochina, are designed to operate without such an appeal. What these techniques

do require is a regime in which the central and provincial governments lack an effective presence -- in the form of competent representatives, rural programs, police or militia, communications and observers -- in the rural countryside. That is a condition that obtains in very large areas of the world today; and it presents the sponsors of insurgency with their chance.

Fundamental to the survival and success of a government -- to its ability to collect taxes, to raise military manpower, to further economic programs, to develop a national spirit of progress -- is its ability to provide physical security for its officials and its citizens. Since the goal of insurgency is to destroy the authority and control of an existing government so as to substitute control by another, the basic step in the Communist technique is to demonstrate the government's inability to provide that physical security.

Beginning in remote, rural areas where the law-enforcement arm of the government is weakest and slowest, there are assassinations and kidnappings. By concentrating on local officials, the terrorists achieve three purposes at once: They dramatize the inability of the central government to protect its own officials, they destroy the government's presence and contact with the rural population in the area, and they demonstrate their own ruthlessness and total commitment -- a lesson that is not lost upon those from whom they demand taxes or labor or information or silence.

As the reputation of their deeds spreads, the guerrillas are able to use local agents relatively openly to collect funds for them, to propagandize, to recruit and to inform on officials, programs, opponents and the movement of government troops. Thus a "shadow" administrative, political

* *ignores 1945-46, 1946-54; colonial experience; Diem gov; US role.*

arm of the insurgency evolves, protected from betrayal and supported in its demands by the strongarm guerrillas.

The analogy to the "protection rackets" run by organized gangsters in big cities in the Twenties is very strong. The crime syndicates had both their "collectors" and their "enforcers"; kidnappings and dynamite bombings were cheap and effective; and it did not take a strong ideological allegiance to the mob to encourage the restaurant owners and laundrymen to pay their "dues" and to keep their mouths shut to the police.

This is the process that the Hanoi regime called into play in South Vietnam. It is the process that may be beginning now in Thailand, where we have recently witnessed the assassinations of rural officials, simultaneously with bland statements in Peking that Thailand is ripe for insurgency.

In South Vietnam the assassinations began in earnest in mid-1957, and grew steadily through 1959. In 1960, Communist terrorists assassinated or kidnapped over 2000 local officials, and civilians. In 1964, 436 civic officials were murdered -- an average of 36 a month. In many case their wives and children were murdered with them. In the same year, 1131 civic officials were kidnapped; and aside from civic officials 1359 South Vietnamese civilians -- government sympathizers, informers, non-cooperators with the VC -- were assassinated and 8423 civilians were kidnapped or captured.

This bleeding and intimidation of the government structure in South Vietnam has gone on for eight years; and it goes on today, brutal and selective as ever. In one month this year, 36 civic officials were murdered, 11 of them in the single province of Thua Thien, where the

Communists are attempting to eliminate government authority. Through May of this year, 756 civilians had been murdered in 1965, including 167 civic officials, 4446 civilians kidnapped, including 388 civic officials.

On the average now, there are each month 2000 separate acts of violence -- assassinations, bombings, kidnappings -- against unarmed civilians.

In the cities, where the Viet Cong does not yet aspire to control, their terrorism has a different, less discriminating character. There, the grenade in the cafe, the bomb in the street, killing women and children randomly, advertises the presence of the VC and creates general anxiety and unrest.

Statistics alone cannot convey the full meaning of this process in what has become the way of life in rural South Vietnam: 11,000 civilians murdered or kidnapped in 1964 -- equivalent in terms of U. S. population to *50,000/yr dead since then* far more than 100,000 Americans! Yet, remarkably, the will to resist the Viet Cong persists, as is demonstrated by the continued willingness of South Vietnamese to accept the village posts that make them targets for attack, or to join the Popular Forces that man village defenses against the night raids of the VC.

With this background as a basis, we can address the two questions I posed earlier: First, the role of American ground and air power within South Vietnam, and second, the role of U. S. and South Vietnamese air attacks against North Vietnam. They are best approached by way of two other questions: First, what are the manpower requirements for combatting insurgency, and

second, what is the importance of the support from the North in feeding and directing the insurgency?

What forces are required to combat the organized terror that I have described? The rule is commonly heard that government forces need a superiority ratio of 10 or 15 to 1 to master the threat posed by guerrilla forces and terrorists. This partly reflects actual experience in countries where insurgencies have been successfully suppressed -- for example, Malaya. But it follows directly from the nature of the guerrilla challenge I have described to you.

Provided by North Vietnam with the critical margins of manpower, material and direction, the Viet Cong destroy and run, usually at night. They sabotage a railroad bridge, forcing the government to guard them all, they bomb a restaurant, causing all public places to be searched and protected; they assassinate a village chief, overloading the police and making good administrators hard to recruit.

Not only must the government forces tie down troops and police defending the most important people and facilities, but it must have quick reaction forces in ^{the} regional reserves, if they are to limit the guerrillas to hit-and-run attacks. And, to seek out and destroy an elusive enemy who has no responsibilities to defend territory or people and can choose to evade battle, they must invest massive efforts in searching and encircling operations.

All of this is beyond the reach of a force that outnumbered its opponents only 4 to 1 or less, as the regular and paramilitary forces of South Vietnam do today.

The main force units of the Viet Cong -- their well-trained, well-equipped, full-time regulars in organized combat units -- are now estimated to number about 47,000 and their irregular forces 80-100,000.

The guerrilla forces of about 140,000 are too much for the present 574,000 South Vietnamese regular and paramilitary and police forces to handle if they are to provide, as I have indicated they must provide, security for citizens and officials and hamlets throughout the country.

Yet as the government forces, expand, infiltration from North Vietnam continues to swell the ranks and provide crucial leadership and technical support of the Viet Cong. Interrogations and documents have so far established the probable infiltration of over 39,000 men since 1959, including 5-8000 last year. Considering the usual time lag between infiltration and this sort of confirmation, we estimate that at least 10,000 infiltrators entered in 1964.

The importance of these infiltrators to the Viet Cong is far out of proportion to their numbers. Most of them have been seasoned guerrilla fighters from the campaign before 1954. They form the great majority of what the Communists call the "cadre": the organizational and unit leadership, all the way from central and regimental headquarters down to squad level. They extend the chain of discipline from Communist Party and military command headquarters in Hanoi down to the districts and hamlets of South Vietnam. They are the technical experts, the weapons specialists, the key communicators, the propagandists, the organizers.

The locally-recruited or coerced South Vietnamese in the Viet Cong form the majority of the 80-100,000 irregulars, the part-time guerrillas

and helpers. But the infiltrators form the majority of the 47,000 hard-core Viet Cong; they are the brains, the backbone and the cement of the movement as a whole.

A newer type of infiltrator, swelling the ranks of the main force troops, is the young ethnic North Vietnamese draftee, sent down in units 500-600 strong; these form up to 75% of the infiltrators in 1964. Their appearance makes clear the determination of North Vietnam to maintain the flow of infiltrators despite the drying up of the pool of former South Vietnamese who obeyed the orders of the Viet Minh to move North in 1954. Still further evidence of this intent is the appearance of a regular combat unit of the North Vietnamese Army, the 2d Battalion of the 101st Regiment, 325th Division, in northwest Kontum Province in South Vietnam. There is some evidence at this moment that still other North Vietnamese regular units have made their appearance.

Another way in which North Vietnam plays a crucial role in the support of the Viet Cong is the supply of arms and ammunition. There have been a great many mis-statements in print to the effect that the bulk of the Viet Cong weapons are U. S. weapons acquired by capture from government forces. A simple comparison of the actual weapons losses by government troops and the overall size of VC forces shows just the reverse. Over 80% of the weapons requirements of the Viet Cong must have been supplied from outside. Capture from government troops -- mostly Popular Forces and regional militia -- has netted the VC only 15,000 weapons over the last four years. The remaining weapons for their 47,000 main force troops and for their 80-100,000 irregulars have had to come from outside South Vietnam.

In a typical Communist weapons cache of 101 weapons captured in April, 90% of the small arms and all of the heavier weapons were Communist Bloc weapons, nearly all Communist Chinese.

From this picture of the over-all challenge, two conclusions follow: First, it is essential that the manpower balance within South Vietnam be shifted in favor of the government forces. Second, it is essential that the critical flow of personnel, support and direction from North Vietnam be reduced.

Steps have been taken to redress the manpower imbalance. First, an increase of 160,000 South Vietnamese regular and paramilitary forces and police is underway. Second, the killed-in-action and missing ratios are improving. Third, defections of the Viet Cong are increasing. Fourth, the "balance of morale" has tipped somewhat our way. Fifth, steps have been and are being taken to "stretch" South Vietnamese manpower -- by giving it better planning, increased mobility, better communications and logistics support, and close air support. And finally, our deployment of U. S. combat units helps the manpower balance in several ways -- by releasing South Vietnamese units from defensive duties for offensive employment, by engaging directly in localized counterinsurgency operations and by providing reserve support to ARVN units. We now have about 9000 Marines at Da Nang and 6000 at Chu Lai; and about 4000 Army airborne troops at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang. By June 10, they will be joined by 900 Australian troops at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang.

To reduce the critical flow of personnel, support and direction from North Vietnam, we have been forced to make attacks on North Vietnam by air.

The purposes of the strikes are to slow down the aggression, to give heart to the suffering people of South Vietnam, and to convince the leaders of North Vietnam that the United States will see her commitment through -- that the United States is prepared for a long continued conflict.

You will recall that, in addition to the continuous terrorist assaults on things primarily Vietnamese, the United States had absorbed the November attack at Bien Hoa airfield, that we had absorbed the Christmas Eve bombing of the Brinks Hotel in Saigon, and that on February 7 the Viet Cong killed 8 and wounded 133 Americans at the Pleiku base in Northern South Vietnam.

On that February 7, the U. S. and South Vietnamese strikes, against North Vietnamese barracks along the infiltration feeder routes, were carried out in less than 20 hours. Since then, there have been more than 100 strikes on North Vietnamese targets -- radar stations, ammunition and supply depots, airfields, barracks, roads, railroad lines, bridges, and so on. The targets have been chosen carefully to avoid civilian damage but to reduce the North Vietnamese capability to infiltrate men and materiel into South Vietnam.

No one believes that the air strikes alone will be sufficient, but along with continued efforts in the South they are essential to a solution. They are essential to cut the flow of supplies. They are essential to convince Hanoi that their efforts in the South cannot succeed -- to prove to them for the first time that their acts of aggression do bring danger to them directly and do carry costs. The strikes give the North for the first time a reason to worry, and a reason to quit. By the same token, they give the Viet Cong in the South a reason to worry that the Northerners

will quit, a reason to doubt that the long hardships of the guerrilla life must eventually, with outside support, win out.

All of these effects should grow with time.

It is the support, infiltration and management from North Vietnam that has made necessary the current level of U. S. support to South Vietnam, and particularly the current involvement of U. S. combat forces -- for the Government of South Vietnam could handle her indigenous problem alone. It is within the power of North Vietnam to make our combat involvements and current levels of support unnecessary.

Is it too much to ask North Vietnam to stop its infiltration of men and materiel; to stop its clandestine direction and encouragement of the insurgency in the South; to order a stop to the Viet Cong Campaign of terror and sabotage in the South; and to remove its controlled units and cadres from the South? It is to help achieve these ends that the air strikes are now being carried out against the North; it is to help achieve these ends that U. S. forces -- military support and combat -- are in South Vietnam. Is there not some way in which the Government of South Vietnam -- absent these intrusions from the North and without the need for massive military assistance from the outside -- can be allowed to find its own way peacefully toward its own consensus and fulfillment?

The people of the United States and of the other nations of the Free World have a dream which is finer than that of the Communists. It is a dream of independence, of fast but orderly change, of as much individual freedom as possible as soon as possible. This is the real goal of all men. We in the Free World are not convinced -- and we do not expect to be convinced -- that it is necessary for the developing nations of the world,

in reaching this goal of freedom, to go through an oppressive intermediate stage of Communism.

We want a peaceful solution to the problem in South Vietnam. We want it very much. We seek no territory there. Nor do we wish to destroy North Vietnam or even, little as we like it, its regime. We want only an independent South Vietnam "securely guaranteed and able to shape its won relationships to all others, free from outside interference, tied to no alliance, a military base for no other country. . . We remain ready, with these purposes, for unconditional discussions" with any government.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the mood in which I began by quoting a remark made by the President, at his daughter's graduation exercise last Tuesday. He said, "It is not hard to act when you know you are right. I find it far more difficult to act when I just believe that I am right, but somehow knowing that I could be wrong."

You must understand, in this connection, three things that plague us in Washington: First, that the facts upon which decisions must be based may be few or conflicting or complex or all three; Second, that inaction is action -- that is, to "not decide" whether to change course is really a decision to continue the present course; and Third, that our job, responsible to you, is to do our best. This we are trying hard to do.